

The Art of Performance Evaluations

Most managers and employees view performance evaluations as necessary but difficult to do. Managers do not look forward to the process and most employees see it as a time when unfair demands or criticisms are made of them. They also see it as a one-sided (biased) view of their performance.

Reflecting on the performance evaluations many employees have experienced, there is good reason for the apprehension they feel about the process, which is the primary reason why evaluations are not done on time if at all. When an employee's performance deteriorates to a level that makes him or her expendable, it is often too late for performance evaluation. Yet if an evaluation is conducted, there is a good chance the employee could be saved. A retained employee increases company moral, reduces costs and increases productivity and profits.

Like many tasks in business, there is need for processes. Accounting needs them, customer service cannot operate without them, inventory management needs them, and so it is with performance evaluations.

Processes minimize the influence of personal bias so the focus can be on the task and the outcome of it. One might ask, what measurable results can a manager and employee expect from a performance evaluation session. Below is a partial list of objectives that managers and employees are experiencing.

Performance Evaluation Expectations

- ✓ A bias free appraisal of the job related performance of the employee
- ✓ Review of the employee's performance of specific job related tasks
- ✓ Review of the employee's job related relations with internal and external customers
- ✓ Review of the most effective way for the employee to communicate with his/her manager
- ✓ Review of the employee's communication style, and how it affects those he/she works with
- ✓ Review of comments made about the employee by internal and external customers
- ✓ Review of the best way for the manager to communicate with the employee
- ✓ Review of the employee's perception of his/her work environment
- ✓ Establish clear job related objectives for enhancing the performance of the employee
- ✓ Establish a clearly stated and agreed upon dateline for meeting enhancement objectives
- ✓ And, other expectations specific to the position and company culture.

When companies benchmark positions to identify the personal talents and technical skills needed for the position, they create a set of key accountabilities the employee needs to adhere to and the manager must use to evaluate the performance of the employee. Evaluations conducted after an employee has performed badly for a long time (a year or more) will produce a highly biased evaluation.

Example of a job related key accountability and the method for measuring it

In this example, the position has a key accountability (attribute) called Personal Accountability. There are many other accountabilities. This attribute is defined as “a measure of the capacity for the employee to be answerable for personal actions”. The purpose for this attribute is to state to the employee he or she will be required to be responsible for their actions of commission and omission. During the evaluation, the employee and manager need to determine how effective the employee is using this attribute by having the following statements evaluated using a five-point scale.

The position calls for a measure of the capacity for the employee to be answerable for personal actions. The response to the following job related statements will measure the performance of the employee as perceived by him or her and the manager.

- Accepts personal responsibility for the consequences of personal actions
- Avoids placing unnecessary blame on others
- Maintains personal commitment to objectives regardless of the success or failure of personal decisions
- Applies personal lessons learned from past failures to moving forward in achieving future successes

Using a ranking scale of 1 to 5, with 1 saying the person does it all of the time and 5 he or she never does it. Both parties (and / or others) create the rank score based on their observations of the person in the work environment.

Let us review one of the above statements: Avoids placing unnecessary blame on others. The employee is NOT to make a habit of blaming others. If the employee rates his / her performance with a 1 or 2 (does not blame others) and the manager has a rating of 4 or 5 (he/she does blame others too much) there is a need for clarification of the realities for the position. The employee believes he/she is not blaming others but the manager (and / or others) claim he/she is. In order for there to be positive expectations from the review, each person must be accountable for their scores by producing clear examples of work situations. This process greatly reduces biases and forces all participants to focus on job related activity.

If you agree “perception is reality”, then the ranking is the reality for each participant. However, when job related examples rather than feelings are used to explain the difference in the scores, everyone has the opportunity to have an “ah” moment. This could lead to better information about expectations, a better way to communicate this information and eliminate a bias view of what should be done. It is very rare that an employee does not want to be the best they can be.

The greatest benefit for a performance evaluation is to provide employees with clear, unbiased directions and expectations for them to be successful, to provide managers with information about the employee’s perception of the expectations that are not correct, and how to correct them, to demonstrate the need for better listening and communication skills between all parties going forward and much more.

Identifying the key accountabilities of any position and holding the employee accountable for them is vital for building a company’s ongoing success. Poor performing employees have impeded the progress of companies in all industries for a long time, which has contributed in no small measure to the current economic condition of our country.

When employees receive consistently accurate information about what is expected of them they perform better, with less stress on them and those they work with, and for a long time.

Performance Evaluations work – they build teams that build successful companies.

Ask us how we can develop a successful performance evaluation process for any position in your company.

On our website, under the Articles tab please find an article entitled "The Cost of Non-Performers"

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